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ABSTRACT

This topical paper discusses briefly the status of research in junior college reading/study skills programs. Specific gaps in research and the fundamental reasons for them are examined. Several areas in critical need of immediate and long-range study are identified. Tests, materials and their selection, programs and approaches, and student motivation are also discussed. Two measures are proposed, which, if implemented, could favorably affect the status of research in the field of reading and eventually improve instructional practices. (Author/CA)

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DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN JUNIOR COLLEGE READING PROGRAMS

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TOPICAL PAPERS

1. A Developmental Research Plan for Junior College Remedial Education. July 1968. Out of print. ED 022 479.

2. A Developmental Research Plan for Junior College Remedial Education; Number 2: Attitude Assessment. November 1968. Out of print. ED 026 050.

3. Student Activism and the Junior College Administrator: Judicial Guidelines. December 1968.

4. Students as Teachers. January 1969.

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6. Is It Really a Better Technique? March 1969. Out of print. ED 030 410.

7. A Developmental Research Plan for Junior College Remedial Education; Number 3: Concept Formation. August 1969. Out of print. ED 032 072.

8. The Junior College in International Perspective. January 1970.

9. Identifying the Effective Instructor. January 1970.

10. Financing Higher Education: A Proposal. February 1970.

11. The Person: A Conceptual Synthesis. March 1970.

12. The Position Papers of Black Student Activists. September 1970.

13. Case Studies in Multi-Media Instruction. October 1970.

14. The Laws Relating to Higher Education in the Fifty States, January 1965 - December 1967. October 1970.

15. Nationwide Pilot Study on Articulation. November 1970.

16. The President's Reaction to Black Student Activism. January 1971.

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FOREWORD

More than any other activity of the junior college instructional process, reading/study skills courses, learning centers, and learning assistance systems effectively serve those students whom the open-door college purports to accommodate. Interestingly, however, the research literature dealing with remedial, developmental, and other so-called repair programs has until recently aroused little interest--nor has it enjoyed measurable recognition among professional studies. Without pedigree, reading and skills practitioners and counselors typically labor in what are often regarded as low-grade service courses or salvage programs, and are usually physically and emotionally isolated from the usual (and presumably respectable) mainstream of the academic community. Understandably, research dealing with these programs suffers from isolation, lack of direction, and consequent lack of dialogue.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss briefly the status of research in junior college reading/study skills programs, to designate specific gaps in the research, to discuss some of the fundamental reasons for these gaps, to identify several areas in critical need of research, to propose two measures, which, if implemented, could favorably affect the status of research in the field and eventually improve instructional practices.

Gene Kerstiens
President-elect
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Directions for Research and Innovation in Junior College Reading Programs

OVERVIEW

Research in junior college reading programs is a microcosm of the research status of the entire field of college-adult reading, a body of literature from which too few coherent and useful results are obtained. In spite of the fact that reading is the object of more study and experiment than any other aspect of academic behavior (42:75; 46:398), such prodigious activity has failed to establish a scientific foundation and a research rationale that effectively improves instruction (42:76).

Current research reviews point out the shortcomings of the literature. Most reading studies are not well enough designed to study whatever problem is under attack (26:338); consequently, most are statistically inaccurate or inadequate (40:58-67). A great many suffer from experimental bias or an over-enthusiasm that attempts to prove that a particular technique, approach, or program produces gains (46:410). Braam sees the college-adult research scene as beset by four principal limitations: extremely restrictive samples, a taboo against replication, a lack of collaborative research, and the absence of longitudinal studies to provide the necessary follow-up (4). Furthermore, a high proportion of these studies are peripheral or just not relevant to the teaching situation (7:106); only about 28 per cent of them investigate or evaluate reading instruction <u>per se</u> (19:192). Finally, reading research seldom anticipates

the future, but traffics principally in status surveys and program descriptions (14:324). Given these characteristics and limitations, instructional practices continue to be based on personal judgment rather than research (17:194).

Status of Research on Junior-Community College Reading Programs

Research literature dealing with community-junior college reading programs is problematical for additional reasons. First of all, few doctoral dissertations have contributed to the field. Of the 408 dissertations written about junior colleges between 1918 and 1963 (37), only three involved reading, and but one of these (31) provided information and recommendations that might lead to improvement of reading programs. Nor does any professional publication adequately represent junior college reading instruction. The Junior College Journal typically contains topics of widespread interest and keeps its heterogeneous audience current on general trends (45:5). During its forty years, the Junior College Journal has published forty-seven articles--about one per year--that deal with varied aspects of reading: remedial, developmental, study skills, vocabulary building, and critical reading programs. Of course, regional and national reading associations incorporate within their publications more articles directed toward reading instruction, but only about four per cent are relevant to the two-year college, and the reader must sift the total offerings to find them. For instance, Emery Bliesmer's comprehensive annual "Review of Research on College-Adult Reading" in the National Reading Conference Yearbook does not have categories that clearly divide junior college reading studies from the vast number listed and reviewed in the entire post-secondary field. Again, the facilities of ERIC/CRIER and ERIC/JCC, while they serve to index,

abstract, reproduce, and disseminate fugitive materials, admittedly do not include in their system the entire sweep of published research that would reflect the status of research in and direction for junior college reading programs. Since, then, no association or journal speaks for community college reading, bibliographical instruments are wanting as well as a comprehensive, professional research matrix from which a coherent body of related research could evolve. Having no vital medium through which to establish a professional dialogue, reading practitioners have rarely looked at their programs with constructive dissatisfaction, and few changes have occurred in reading instruction beyond the primary grades in recent years (46:398).

Reasons for Gaps in Research

Other reasons for this lack of research dialogue can be found in the character of the junior college reading specialist. There is every indication that the orientation of the typical junior college reading instructor and director is pragmatic, not theoretical; that his primary research interest is cursory investigation, not basic research (49:50); that his approach is existential, not teleological. Such tendencies do not lend themselves to a climate of experimental enthusiasm from which a broad research base is likely to evolve. Like his colleagues in other disciplines, the reading instructor often feels cut off from the mainstream of professional organizations because their emphases do not materially satisfy his indigenous needs (15:83). His lack of participation is reflected in his reluctance to contribute proportionately to the literature in professional journals (45:5), as well as in his spotty attendance at national and regional reading conferences. For instance, a review of attendance lists of the North Central Reading Association and the Southwest Reading Conference (for those

years when records were published) reflects a four per cent junior college participation. In fact, this tendency toward parochialism best characterizes the junior college reading instructor and accounts for his customary timidity in the field of research.

The average junior college reading instructor does not work in an academic environment conducive to experimental study. His services are characteristically obtained because he is a "superior teacher" (22), and he is seldom rewarded or advanced for his research output. Should he choose to carry on an experiment, he will find lack of time his greatest deterrent (15:36); should he report his experiment, he cannot feel sure that his intramural colleagues or superiors will understand it or respect it--if they read it at all (21:8; 45:9). He cannot ordinarily expect grants or summer pay to develop innovations and produce research studies (15:39); nor has he sufficient research facilities (38:52) or other trappings of a research-oriented structure--graduate student assistance, teaching assistants, released time, subsistence honoraria, a curricular framework conducive to controlled grouping, or an adequate research library with depth in reading journals; neither is the would-be researcher likely to get substantive support from his dean or president, who is only slightly more adventuresome than the principal of the high school, from which comes an estimated 70 per cent (22) of junior college practitioners. Also, he is unlikely to have the services or guidance of an office of institutional research at his disposal (59:180-83) to help him design, administer, and prepare studies and reports. Finally, he has no assurance, should any research finding point to needed change requiring a substantial program renovation or an appreciable expenditure of money, that his findings, however compelling, will be translated into practice on his own campus. Thus, the limitations of the junior

college academic ecology become, in part, the limitations and inadequacies of his own research capability.

Breadth and Character of Literature

We should little wonder that there is a relative paucity of substantive studies that relate directly or incisively to junior college reading programs or that reading research shares with research in most other junior college disciplines a posture of defensiveness, an emphasis on means rather than ends, and a lack of specificity (20:18; 45:7). Lacking background in research procedure and organized fact-finding activities (49:50), practitioners tend to produce descriptive, instead of experimental, research (40:58-67), vaguely worded reports, surveys of existing procedures and practices, and reports of programs that are "rarely examined in a professional manner" (45:2).

RESEARCH MATTERS FOR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION

Mere criticism of the literature that has failed to contribute to the development and advancement of professionalism in reading will not in itself solve the problem. Perhaps most meaningful would be to discuss a few critical areas for immediate study. Successful completion of research in these areas would provide sound studies that could favorably affect instructional practices and generate a reliable base on which future research could build.

Tests

In spite of agreement that the junior college student is likely to be of a different academic character and level than the undergraduate student in a four-year college (10:36; 35:126; 48:2; 51:29; 53:13; 61:117; 64), no reading test batteries or individual reading test instruments have evolved that are based on junior college populations or that specifically measure those reading skills germane

to the junior college student's reading requirements. While in all academic areas junior colleges make extensive and perforce necessary use of standardized diagnostic, screening, and achievement tests, these instruments are not designed to discriminate adequately among members of their clientele or to pinpoint deficiencies that should be treated in their programs.

When we consider that the average junior college student will score at the thirtieth percentile on a national standardized test (61:117) and that junior colleges consistently report that their "average student" falls well below national norms on standardized reading comprehension and vocabulary tests (36:10), the need for such a new instrument seems apparent on the basis of scores alone. Yet other reasons argue for tests designed for the junior college level. A junior college reading program is inclined to entertain the "remedial student," the person with deficiencies in basic reading skills--phonics, pronunciation, word attack, word recognition, spelling, and other rudimentary skills often taken for granted or otherwise ignored on present standardized reading tests (34:57). Because most present standardized group-testing devices do not pretend to diagnose in these areas, teachers have resorted to patchwork test batteries which, though helpful, are based on elementary and secondary populations. Again, inasmuch as junior community colleges serve a heterogeneous reading population (32:23-24), their reading tests should measure a wider range of reading skills (27:18). Moreover, there is reason to suppose that typical speed and comprehension tests have doubtful predictive value when applied to the low-achieving student (29:64-67).

While one occasionally hears of a researcher or a company engaged in developing a viable junior college reading test, at this writing only one shows promise of being published. In 1967, Kurak (27) reported work on a "valid" reading test for the growing junior college population, a test that takes into account the nature of the

junior college reading problem and uses material taken from the texts commonly encountered in the curriculum. One reported effort, however, is not enough. As diagnosis, placement, and individualized treatment of junior college readers is so crucial to a reading program, a critical need for intensive and comprehensive research and development in this area is certainly apparent.

Materials

The need for research on materials exists in two areas: in the selection of available resources and in the development of new materials effective at the junior college level.

Selection of Materials. Ten years ago, the junior college reading specialist's problem of selecting materials for a reading laboratory was simple. There being comparatively few books, programs, or pieces of hardware available, it was possible for a vital reading practitioner to know them all and to make considered choices among them. Today the market is flooded with all manner of materials whose advertising claims unsupported virtues. With so much presented for examination, he cannot, with any degree of assurance, know that he is selecting wisely. Furthermore, although certain books or programs may have parts usable for his purposes, they are not often effective or appropriate in their entirety.

Present attempts to help a reading instructor locate, review, and choose appropriate materials are not effective. Although reading journals "review" some materials that might be relevant, such appraisals are usually subjective, tend to be equivocal, seldom point out inadequacies, and are virtually never supported by research findings to bolster their recommendations. Also, few studies or reviews of materials offered in these journals are well enough designed or specific enough to be satisfactory for instructors seeking evaluation (12:849-50). One step toward helping the instructor improve his choice of

materials was the Educational Products Information Exchange, initiated to serve as an evaluative clearinghouse for information on the increasingly numerous and complex products of the education industry (46:422). According to the U. S. Post Office, however, this agency has moved and left no forwarding address. There is, then, a need for a concerted research effort to test advertising claims (57:88) and to provide the instructor with professional evaluations of extant materials.

Development of New Materials. Although increased author-publisher energy has been expended to produce materials needed in junior college programs, there have been few systematized efforts at development. Because he does not have enough effective remedial materials (13:101-02; 44:127), the junior college instructor has often resorted to elementary nostrums that, chances are, did not help the student when he first encountered them in the lower grades. Seeking fruitlessly for adequate developmental materials, the reading instructor has settled for generalized college-adult materials that he can only hope will apply to the junior college reader. This materials gap is not likely to be filled by a research-oriented publisher, for most publishers still rely on author-editor intuition in deciding whether something makes for an effective teaching instrument. In fact, most publishers "shoot in the dark" and do not adequately pre-test or carefully evaluate materials before they offer them on the market (63).

Since research, especially recent research, has contributed little to the selection and development of appropriate and effective materials, well-designed studies to develop materials and objective reporting to evaluate those presently available are needed. A "consumer's guide" to junior college reading materials might be in order.

Programs and Approaches

Individualization. In recent years the rationale for, if not the usual practice of, college reading programs has moved toward individualization of instruction (16:574). Though slow to accelerate, this trend has taken advantage of developments in instructional technology as they apply to clinical or laboratory situations, and has made fuller use of expertise available in other fields by integrating the strengths of these disciplines (33). There has been a departure from the classroom-lecture, packaged, skills-drills teaching of reading and an advancement, in intent if not in practice, toward a systems approach to learning that requires more precise diagnosis, individual prescription, and more carefully selected materials to help a student repair or improve his reading/study skills (39; 43; 54:233; 65:235). The prescription of the "giant aspirin" has been superseded by more specific academic drugs that attack reading deficiencies,an improvement made possible through advances in technology. The lecture-classroom approach has been relinquished to the laboratory; the instructor's role has given way to the counseling role; the single-text has been traded for varied resources, many of then programmed (1; 2; 8:170; 9; 11; 20:18; 23:153; 30; 43; 52; 55). The word teaching appears significantly less often in the literature, being superseded by the word learning. While this is the trend, it cannot yet be said that it is the typical reading instruction situation; individualization is more an ideal than a reality (52), and what are called laboratories or clinics are often merely classrooms with a few electronic devices and boxed programs. More studies that establish the effectiveness of individualized programs and research that recommends ways of achieving a transition to them are needed.

Technology and Reading. Because it is fast, objectively

efficient, can be programmed to achieve sophisticated selection, is accurate, and especially because it saves the instructor time for the personalized aspects of instruction, the computer has helped make individualized programs possible. There is little doubt that, as campus populations become larger and as open-door policies become more a reality than an issue, the computer will become helpful, if not necessary, in preliminary diagnosis, in placement, in counseling (5:171-72), and in preparing individualized programs for students who otherwise would get lost in the academic machinery and fail to receive help in specific skill deficiencies. In the areas of diagnosis and placement, at least two large community junior colleges presently are using computers, and others are planning to do so when their capability is established. Thus, some computer-assisted or computer-managed junior college reading/study skills problems are emerging, and more promise to do so as the systems analysis technique is used more routinely on campuses (60). Prompt and accurate reports on this trend can help bring junior college reading instruction toward the counseling-oriented, humanized approach that has been anticipated by researchers (41:168-70; 56).

Learning Centers and Reading Programs. To the extent that the full force of technical media is applicable to reading instruction, learning centers or learning resource centers are becoming necessary allies to reading programs in junior colleges with a propensity toward multi-media instruction. This marriage of systems seems quite natural, since they can both share the hardware and other materials. Moreover, the learning centers themselves have, in some cases, become the centers for research and innovation on junior college campuses (28:8). Such fusion of media and instruction is by nature so

innovative that it should for some time be the object of institutional research studies.

Multidisciplinary Aspects of Reading Programs. Since the point of individualized programs is that each learner is unique, learns at a different rate, and therefore responds to different therapy, it is consistent for the reading clinician to make use of the resources of his colleagues in other disciplines (32: 24-25; 33:716). Too often the reading program--and certainly not always by choice--remains an island unto itself when it should be cooperating with other academic departments and other professions to achieve more thorough diagnosis and treatment for clients (11:25; 18:46; 47:46-47). For instance, compelling evidence exists that vision screening should be a routine step in a reading clinic's operation (25; 47:46; 58:237; 62). Other studies indicate that physical therapy, visual training, health education, and health counseling can help alleviate problems that block reading and study efficiency (24). Finally, since many reading programs purport to help a student acquire skills useful in all academic disciplines (39), more research on effective techniques of teaching listening, writing, note-taking, and study-reading skills are needed.

Student Motivation

One rather consistent concern of instructors of reading/study skills is low student motivation (23:140; 61:57). Perhaps two reasons explain why they are so aware of this problem. First (especially inasmuch as reading programs are moving away from the traditional-lecture classroom, information-processing situation toward an individualized, heuristic method of learning), the student has more responsibility for directing himself. Since he is not often acquainted with or comfortable

in this more responsible position, he sometimes finds himself unable to schedule his time, sustain a pace, or set his own proximate learning goals (10:36; 55:64). Second, the student engaging in a junior college reading/study skills program is usually classified as "remedial" (50:454) and remedial students are noted for their lack of motivation. Stimulating a student already frustrated by and sometimes even accustomed to failure is every reading specialist's concern, yet few studies on student motivation have pointed to remedies.

At this writing, at least one competent research design has been specifically prepared to investigate the nature of the low-motivated student (3).* The next phase of research is the study of innovative instructional or counseling techniques to benefit the low-motivated student. Such action research seems necessary when we note that 70 per cent of junior college students are classified as remedial (50:454) and that 40 per cent are on academic probation at some time during their college career (6).

RESEARCH MATTERS OF LONG-RANGE CONCERN

If the future for research in the junior college reading/study skills is going to amount to more than a disorganized array of sporadic reports that lack center or identity, if the field is going to develop a body of professional literature on both basic research at the regional and national level and effective action research at the local level, at least two major measures should be implemented.

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*This is one of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges' Topical Papers, which represents an advancement for the ERIC system from an agency of information processing to one of research leadership.

I. Now that an annotated bibliography encompassing forty-one years of reported research and experiment in junior-community college reading/study skills programs has been developed,* there is need for publication of an annual review of research to augment it and to evaluate current findings in the field.

II. So that (A) all professional organizations that contribute to the field of junior college reading be represented; (B) all national, regional, and local research capabilities be utilized and coordinated; and (C) sufficient budgetary support be obtained, a coordinated research thrust in the field of junior college reading/study skills should be made to incorporate the strengths and capabilities of the following agencies:

1. U.S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare;
2. ERIC/CRIER, University of Indiana and ERIC/JCC, University of California at Los Angeles;
3. American Association of Junior Colleges;
4. National and regional reading associations, such as the College Reading Association, the International Reading Association, the North Central Reading Association, the National Reading Conference, and the Western College Reading Association;
5. League for Innovation in the Community College;
6. Community College Planning Center, Stanford University;
7. Special Interest Group in Junior College Research, American Educational Research Association;
8. School Research Information Service, Phi Delta Kappa; and

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*Kerstiens, Gene. Junior-Community College Reading/Study Skills: An Annotated Bibliography. 6 Tyre Avenue, Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1971 (Price $.75).

9. local offices of institutional research.

Proper use of the above-mentioned facilities and organizations could provide better research designs, increased budgetary support, meaningful replication, prompt publication, and the means of widespread dissemination. It could exercise some leadership for and control of the quality of research literature by providing editorial guidance that could result at least in better reporting. As Jacques Barzun states, "What is not properly presented is simply <u>not</u> present--and its purely potential existence is quite useless." Finally, such organization of research capability would establish a much-needed interchange among those who are interested in improving reading instruction, so that by learning from each other's research, they will not be condemned to repeat it.

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